NOVACON 41

Progress Report 1

GoH John Meaney

Park Inn, Nottingham
11th – 13th November 2011

Guest of Honour: **John Meaney**

Membership Rates

Adults: £40 13-16 years: £10 12 and under free
Rates apply until Easter 2011 and subject to review afterwards.
Day rates will be available.

Hotel Rooms

Double or Twin: £42 pppn Single: £ 59 pppn
Children: under 5 years free, 5-14 years £5 pppn (ages at the date of the convention)

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Welcome to PR1 for Novacon 41

And welcome to the 5th decade of Novacons!

After attending the majority of the 40 previous Novacons without lifting a finger to help, and after several drinks in the downstairs bar at the Park Inn last year, we finally succumbed to 'becoming active'. Goodness, we even volunteered without any sign of arms being twisted! So here we are, part of the organising committee and in charge of the publications. Now you know who to blame for spelling mistakes, errors of omission and misinformation (it was his/her fault, depending on which one of us you're talking to).

We are planning to run several themes through the PRs and Programme Book. Two of these are:

- Novacon from a different perspective. There are a lot of people who cannot just sit in the bar and chat all day long. They have other responsibilities which mean they have a different experience to the 'normal' attendees, i.e. people who are working to ensure that you have an enjoyable time. The committee, the runners, the people in the book room and art room, running the PA, even the GoH. We are hoping to get views of Novacon from a selection of these people to see how their Novacons are different from ours.
- Fanzines and the Nova Awards. We have both been intimately involved in fanzine fandom, and want to promote a higher profile for them and the Nova Awards, which have suffered reducing numbers of votes over recent years.

Along the bottom of the pages here you will see Novacon-related factoids that you just couldn't live without – if you have any others we'd love to receive them. Our contact details are listed opposite.

As well as continuing with our underlying themes, future issues we will be featuring more on the programme as it is finalised, as well as more articles about John Meaney.

John & Eve Harvey

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Words from the Chair

Well here we are again, though it feels a bit different for me this time. I have been helping to run Novacons for some considerable time now and have "mostly" enjoyed it a lot, however this time I'm in charge (so to speak) which makes me feel a little strange. The other thing to consider is that we are moving forward into Novacon's 5th decade I don't know about you but I find that a bit daunting.

"Where do we go from here" as Buffy and Co. might sing.

Seriously though, as Richard Standage says in his piece on the Programme, we are looking for good ideas, themes and directions.

The date of the convention is 11.11.11 – surely there must be something related to that, for example, binary 111111 = 255, 111111 **x** 111111 = 12345654321 etc.

Please send ideas or other related trivia to the usual address.

The committee remains much the same as last year, with the welcome addition of John and Eve Harvey, back to convention running as our publications and publicity team. Richard and Helena have returned to programming and Alice continues to count the money whilst Tony pursues his attempt to persuade the hotel to do exactly what we want **all** the time. Cat records our intelligent and abstruse musings when we get together to plan ~~our conquest of the world~~ the convention. I, of course, know where you all live.

I am very pleased to welcome John Meaney as our guest of honour. His first Novacon was Novacon 8, which would have been at the Holiday Inn in Birmingham. I remember him attending many subsequent Novacons, and his rather alarming party trick of doing the splits across two chairs remains in my mind very strongly. John has assured me that he can still perform this feat, which could make for an interesting Guest of Honour talk.

John and his wife Yvonne were attendees of many Novacons in the 80's and 90's.I am sure many people remember, and still wear, Yvonne's many and varied waistcoats. These really brightened up the dealers room, and, if I remember correctly some convention committees.

Sadly as John's writing career took off we were to see less of him at cons but happily more of his books in the dealer's room. It is always good to see fans metamorphose successfully into pros, which adds to the pleasure of being able to honour them by inviting them back as guests.

That's all from me for now – see you all on 11.11.11.

Steve Lawson

How many different hotels have hosted Novacon?

Novacon and John Meaney

*(Some personal reminiscenses of Novacon and John Meaney by **Dave Lally**)*

What an excellent combination!

Firstly: Novacon. I've been involved with this (the 2nd longest-running Con in Britain[1]) since the 1990s and I've run a video programme for them for at least the last 10+ years.

I think I began my association with Birmingham fandom with the (ill fated) TwentyCon[2] – certainly my diaries show Novacon attendance from the Royal Angus onwards.

In the old days I would leave on the Sunday evening (back to big smoke London) but then I saw the light: the beer-tasting event (with the food theme chosen by the GoH). What a great way to end the Con and get (politely now) 'rodent rear-ended' [3] with good nosh!

Merely bring at least 3 unusual beers (in my case I understand that 7.5% ABV Nigerian Guinness goes down well, though I don't drink the Dublin or Lagos brew myself [4]), get a beer badge and you're in (and later, as we Irish say, get "locked")!

Stay on that extra night, wake up on the Monday in the Con hotel and find that the normal (non-Con), for-the-suits, breakfast has items on it that didn't appear earlier in the weekend. But this isn't unusual and applies to most breakfasts in most Con hotels.

Next : Our 2011 (41st Novacon) GoH:John Meaney (JM).

I could start with a review of JM's work such as To Hold Infinity and Absorption (and also his latest non-SF thriller (Point) done under his alter ego: Thomas Blackthorne) . But to illustrate my liking of JM (and its not just because of his Irish connections – well it's Meaney isn't it), I will recall an incident at Cannon St Railway Station some little time ago (of course John would prefer to forget this).

Working in Financial Services[5] in the City, on one occasion I had to visit that 'mainly open-in-the-weekday-rush-hours' station which had only a small W H Smith bookstall.

I entered and thought "that's John Meaney standing there reading – waiting for his train" (to rural Kent where he lives). He didn't see me so I walked up on one

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12 (not counting name change of The Excelsior)

side and then the other to double check it was indeed him (and it was).

Then the mischief (from which GLF has since emerged [6]) began. I went down the other end of the stall (carefully not drawing attention to myself) and looked strenuously for any of his works on the SF section – none. There were some Pratchetts (but of course) and a McCaffrey. I think I picked one of Anne's works and then tiptoed up behind him, thrust the tome in front of his face and exclaimed: "great author – not like some we know"!

Only in that nanosecond did my mental processes remind me that John was a black belt in something or other and my likely fate was to be crushed between the station buffers and a carriage. However, if I recall correctly, JM took it well. He didn't recoil and (I think) we went off for either a beer/coffee before he caught his train.

Since that incident (or perhaps despite that) John and Good Lady Yvonne have always "greeted" me at Cons and he was (I think) the only SF author to attend the (in)famous Eastercon at Chester in 2007.

Which brings me nicely round to Novacon again because it was at that Novacon in 2006 – prior to Chester – that Eastercon was saved.

So – again – JM (and GLY) welcome!

Notes :

(1) The 3rd longest Con appears to be Fantasycon – still going strong (of course Eastercon itself reigns supreme)

(2) I understand that TwentyCon was not a financial success (tho' this writer enjoyed it and it meant he would "darken BSFG's doors" again and again thereafter...)!

(3) Impoliteness translation: rodent=r * t, rear-ended= a * * e

(4) I prefer the real-ale Oyster stout brewed by Dublin's The Porterhouse pub (www.theporterhouse.ie) which Irish fen use, when this writer hosts the dead-dogs Dublin event after the two Irish Cons (Phoenix Con in the Spring and Octocon in October). It has a Maiden Lane (London's Covent Garden) outlet but avoid it on Rugby days and/or on or around 17 March ! But their beer range (own-brewed and imported) is very good.

(5) And before I'm mistakenly lynched as a banker, I'm in pensions (long term savings not short term).

(6) "Guaranteed Lally Free" is a concept which has evolved within SF in recent times (withJM's incident no doubt adding to it). A number of SF event organisers – aware of non attendance by this writer – have been tempted (armed with this knowledge) to proclaim such. The problem is that they probably would have to double their capacity to deal with the crowds!! (Think of all those cringing jokes people don't have to endure!)

How many authors have been Novacon Guest of Honour more than once?

The Programme

As usual, at this early stage there is very little that we can say about the programme, other than to promise you that there definitely will be one.

In keeping with tradition, we'll find the flimsiest of excuses to have a party on the Friday evening. We'll tax your brains and test your hangover remedies to their limit with the science talks on Saturday and Sunday mornings. We'll relieve you of some of your valuable drinking cash at the art and book auctions. And for those people with no homes to go to we'll wind down on the Sunday evening with the beer and food tasting.

As I'm sure you know by now John Meaney is our Guest of Honour, and we'll be featuring him as much as we can reasonably get away with to give you all a chance to get to know him and his work.

Everything else is just a cloud of ideas at the moment, all being hotly debated and refined at our meetings. Keep your eye on the website for any updates. It goes without saying (although I am going to anyway) that if you have any thoughts or ideas yourself for items that you would like to see, or even anything you would like to roll up your sleeves and organise (we're always happy for people to volunteer) then get in touch either at the email address on the contacts page in this PR or via the website.

Richard Standage

Miscellany

Art Show

Serena Culfeather has agreed to run this again after her excellent work over the last two years. Artists looking to exhibit work (for auction or otherwise) should contact her soon:

serena@ravensquill.org

Dealer's Room

As in previous years, this will be in the large room next to the bar! £20 per 6ft table for the weekend and you have to be a member of the convention to book space. Interested dealers should contact Tony Berry:

morbius@altair-4.co.uk

Parents' co-op

As usual Novacon will not be operating a crèche but we will be setting aside a room for smaller children to play under parental supervision if there is sufficient demand. If you're interested let us know as soon as possible.

Food and drink

Again as usual, and whenever Tony has any say in the matter, there will be real ale and a good cider provided in the bar, plus a range of snacks and meals throughout the weekend.

6, the most being Brian Aldiss and Iain Banks who have both been guests 3 times.

The Hotel

The Park Inn is proving to be a splendid venue for Novacon, with the main programme and dealers' room all on the ground floor and a lift to the artshow and extra programme rooms downstairs. The staff are friendly and efficient and always willing to help. Last year there were problems on Friday evening with the convention food, and a number of people had to wait a long time for their orders. I met with the duty manager the following morning and he told me that this was because a much higher number of members had decided to eat in the restaurant rather than order the bar meals, which messed up their timing and preparation. Having said that, it was still not acceptable and I'm sorry if you were one of those people affected. Hopefully it won't happen again.

The other thing I tried last year was to get the downstairs bar open as well as the main bar upstairs. Again, this was popular on the Friday evening, but pretty under-used on Saturday and Sunday during the day. So this year we'll probably just be opening it on Friday and Saturday evening. Do make use of it or the hotel may decide it's not worth the effort, which would be a shame as it's a quiet bar with comfy seating. Apart from that there was quite a lot of real ale left over, so please drink harder and faster. Or it could just be because Martin Tudor wasn't there.

The hotel has a gym, pool and jacuzzi which look nice but I wouldn't know as these may involve exercise. We get free use of these facilities.

IMPORTANT STUFF

The hotel has 170 rooms so we should be able to fit you all in. However, if you want a single room it is still a good idea to book it as soon as possible.

Room rates for B&B are: single £59 per night, double or twin £42pppn. Children over 14 years pay adult rate.

The hotel has no family rooms as such, but it does have a small number of connecting rooms which can be used for families. Two interconnecting rooms (1 double and 1 twin) for 2 adults and 2 children up to 14 years will be £120 per night. First come first served! You can also have a fold-away bed or cot put into your room for a child up to 14 years at no extra cost, but you will have to pay for the child's breakfast.

Although the hotel does not require a deposit, if you are going to arrive after 4pm on the day (that's most of you!) you will have to guarantee your room with a credit card (no charge will be taken) so that it is not sold to somebody else by the automated letting system. Please contact the hotel directly for this (Tel: 0115 935 9988).

Tony Berry

Whose first convention was Novacon 8?

2011 Nova Awards

It's nearly forty years since the Nova Awards first recognised achievement in British sf fanzines, a field which has changed greatly during that period. That fact was at the heart of Novacon 39's debate on the future of the Novas, although – for a variety of reasons – no further action was taken over the subsequent twelve months, and when I agreed to step back in and shepherd last year's Novas, there was no alternative but to run them under the existing rules.

Not that those rules hadn't already evolved significantly during my previous administration. Since 2003, electronic fanzines have been eligible for the Novas, as well as fanzines from Eire. Last year, Chris Garcia became the first non-UK/Irish recipient of a Nova, as part of the transAtlantic editorial team helming *Journey Planet*.

This year, I'm proposing we break down the barriers even further and open the Nova Awards up to the entirety of British and Irish fandom, rather than confine it to Novacon's membership. With the committee's agreement, I plan to post ballot forms online and allow electronic voting. The requirement for voters to have read at least six eligible fanzines during the previous year would remain, in order to ensure an informed vote, but the easy availability of fanzines online mean that's scarcely a major hurdle (for instance, all but three of the fourteen publications listed below have electronic editions).

Further details will be posted in due course on the Novacon website, and in the next progress report.

The following fanzines have been received by or brought to the notice of the Nova Awards administrator since 1 October 2010 and are considered eligible for the 2011 awards under the current rules: *An Fleghes Hager-Na Yu Canjeons #3**, Doug Bell; *Ansible #279 - #284**, Dave Langford; *Banana Wings #44*, Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer; *Brum Group News #470*, Rog Peyton for the Birmingham Science Fiction Group; *Data Dump* #157, #158, Steve Sneyd; *Exhibition Hall #15**, Chris Garcia, Ariana Wolfe & James Bacon; *The Fortnightly Fix #16 - #21**, Steve Green; *Head #10**, Doug Bell & Christina Lake; *iShoes #4*, Yvonne Rowse; *Journey Planet #7**, James Bacon, Claire Brialey & Chris Garcia (with guest editor Pete Young); *Paranoid #23**, Ian Maule; *Pips #4, #5**, Jim Mowatt; *Quantum B*llocks #1, #2**, Jinnie Cracknell; *Septillion Year Spree*, David Haddock. (*Available online; full details at the Novacon website.)

Steve Green

Lots of people, but most importantly John Meaney

The Best SF Book Since 1971.

The results of the Novacon 40 Survey.

Voting for anything in fandom generally consists of a certain portion of goodwill and considered thought, but let's be honest about the 'oh well if I must', 'I'm bored – oh, what's this form?' and 'we were only joking about him standing for TAFF you know' factors. However we thought it would be A Good Thing to run a poll and see what people thought was the best SF book they'd read since Novacon 1, or simply 'Novacon' as it was called then. We thought there'd be a panel in it. There was. It was Sunday afternoon and I was shattered by this point, helping prepare for the Awards Ceremony (not Closing Ceremony – Novacon never closes) and by all accounts it was pretty good. I tabulated the votes and gave them to Kari who'd agreed to moderate the panel. She said things like 'ah', 'oh' and 'hmm'.

There's the whole contentious issue of the concept of 'best' too. I personally don't like the idea, but I'd concede it's a useful tool to start a discussion.

Most voters, as you'll see, appear to have given some thought to the matter, perhaps considering significance of the book on publication, influence down the years on other writers, meaning to their own lives. Combined with the traditional focus of Novacon, its popular writers and the authors who hold a special place in the hearts of British fans, the breakdown of votes cast, although broad, is not surprising.

Some points on the validity of this survey. Firstly, about 15% of attending members voted. This is not huge but analysis weighed against personal experience of Novacon members' likes and dislikes (ie: what panels they actually attend, what SF they like to argue about) means I consider it (broadly) representative of those fans who have attended Novacons regularly for however long they've been in fandom. Secondly, I have worked on a real election and can assure you all ballots were counted, validated and original results as discussed at the convention meticulously tabulated on the back of an envelope which I then lost. To ensure the integrity of this vital resource for fan historians of the future, the ballots were then officially hurled into the official nearest carrier bag to hand when packing up Ops and have sat in my official pile of crap next to the computer ever since. Thirdly, the validity of my analysis itself is ensured by

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Which hotel has Novacon used the most?

the fact I used to work at the Office for National Statistics. Yes, I know I was the Health and Safety Officer, but some of that stuff rubs off you know…

Fourthly, we accepted anything. The objective was after all to find out what people thought and debate it, not to shoehorn the members' thoughts and feelings into some preconceived idea of what 'best' 'SF' or ''book' was. If they wrote it down, it got counted.

Fifthly, the ballots contained boxes labelled 1, 2 and 3 and since some fans clearly voted assuming a ranking system was in use I have scored by both total ballots received and ranking on each ballot. So I will tell you 'ballots' received and 'score' based on ranking 1,2,3 (giving 3, 2, and 1 points respectively).

Now, for the thrilling results.

52 different books were nominated, or slightly more if we accept the votes for "Mars Trilogy" and "Merchant Princes series". Of these only eight received more than one ballot.

In JOINT 6TH PLACE we have a tie between THE HITCH HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY and NEUROMANCER. Both received 2 ballots and scored 4.

In JOINT 5TH PLACE we have RINGWORLD and THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER. Both received 2 ballots and scored 5.

In 4TH PLACE comes RED MARS (3, 6).

In 3RD PLACE I give you PERDIDO STREET STATION (3, 7) although obviously third and fourth tie without the scoring system. That pesky scoring system is about to make things interesting.

In SECOND PLACE for the title of best SF book published since 1971 I am delighted that the membership has selected Christopher Priest's THE PRESTIGE (5 ballots received, scoring 14 points).

Now the moment we've all been waiting for. The reason I'm wearing this sparkly dinner jacket and bow tie tonight…

… in FIRST PLACE, the Best SF Book published since 1971, in the opinion of the membership of Novacon 40 is:

STARS IN MY EYES by Peter Weston. 5 ballots received, scoring 15 points.

To the keen fan historian there is of course a fulfilling symmetry about this, even if one might take issue with order of the top two. The young Priest wrote for the

young Weston's Speculation back in the sixties – in the formative days of their careers in writing and editing respectively. To see them recognised jointly at a Novacon four decades later is pleasing. The more cynical fan might mutter that the Brummie block vote remains a force to be reckoned with and they stuffed the ballot but this was this was an option equally available to lovers of the literature of space exploration and the existential uncertainty of the future as well as lovers of anecdotes about odd people in basement flats in the 1960s.

There's one glaring omission, especially for a Novacon. The Guest of Honour was Iain M Banks yet he doesn't appear at all. Iain's fault lay in writing too many good books. Five different Banks novels were nominated, with a maximum of two for any other writer. If we score by author we get (in order): Weston, Priest, Banks, Brunner and Gibson.

ALL THE BOOKS NOMINATED: A Brief History of Time; A Scanner Darkly; Air; Arabesk Trilogy; Books of Blood; Cats Cradle; Chasm City; Consider Phlebas; Cyteen; Dhalgren; Downbelow Station; Dune; Enders Game; Espedair Street; Fifth Head of Cerberus; Gateway; Hell House; Helliconia Spring; Hitch Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy; Hyperion; Look To Windward; Merchant Princes series; Mona Lisa Overdrive; Neuromancer; Pasquale's Angel; Perdido Street Station; Red Mars; Rendezvous With Rama; Replay; Ringworld; River Of Gods; Snow Crash; Stars In My Eyes; Tau Zero; The Dancers At The End Of Time; The Difference Engine; The Dispossessed; The Female Man; The Pastel City; The Postman; The Prestige; The Reality Dysfunction; The Sheep Look Up; The Shockwave Rider; The Skinner; The State Of The Art; The War Amongst The Angels; To Hold Infinity; Triton; Use of Weapons; Valis and Voyage.

I defy you not to play the game here. What game? This game: 'Yes, but what about The Diamond Age, The Encyclopaedia of SF, Stand on Zanzibar…' and on and on. Although I'm more surprised at the omission of work by quite a number of authors who were at the convention. There were so many that if one threw something over one's shoulder in the bar one would almost certainly hit an author. They made me stop doing that.

Dave Hicks

Novacon 41 Members

as at 19/03/2011

1	John Meaney
2	Yvonne Meaney
28	½r
23	Michael Abbott
6	Brian Aldiss
86	Brian Ameringen
88	Meriol Ameringen
124	Margaret Austin
3	Iain M Banks
96	Barbara-Jane
27	Chris Bell
113	Alan Bellingham
49	Austin Benson
10	Tony Berry
11	Helena Bowles
20	Claire Brialey
69	Michelle Broadribb
70	Tim Broadribb
42	Vernon Brown
43	Pat Brown
114	Ian Brown
116	E.D. Buckley
54	Jonathan Cain
53	Marianne Cain
52	Steven Cain
33	David Carlile
29	David Cluett
30	Joyce Cluett
12	Cat Coast
72	Del Cotter
109	Dave Cox
59	Margaret Croad
115	Helen Cross
120	Nelson Cunnington
111	Julia Daly
18	Michael Davidson
19	Christine Davidson
98	Steve Davies
102	Malcolm Davies
122	Robert Day
117	Simon Dearn
99	Giulia DeCesare
40	Vincent Docherty
93	Paul Dormer
125	Martin Easterbrook
121	Cathryn Easthope
57	Sue Edwards
78	Gwen Funnell
68	Ron Gemmell
56	Niall Gordon
100	Dave Hardy
7	Harry Harrison
14	John Harvey
15	Eve Harvey
89	Susie Haynes
71	Julian Headlong
84	Dave Hicks
85	Penny Hicks
127	Martin Hoare
128	Al Johnston
65	Sue Jones
44	Leigh Kennedy

47	Tim Kirk
126	Dave Lally
9	Alice Lawson
8	Steve Lawson
46	Peter Mabey
5	Ian R MacLeod
119	Clarrie Maguire
118	Tim Maguire
95	Rory McLean
63	Pat Meara
64	Michael Meara
34	Chris Morgan
35	Pauline Morgan
103	Carol Morton
104	Tony Morton
87	Caroline Mullan
48	James Odell
37	Omega
60	Andrew Patton
38	Hal Payne
39	Jodie Payne
36	Harry Payne
62	Mali Perera
123	Rog Peyton
106	Catherine Pickersgill
105	Greg Pickersgill
21	Mark Plummer
45	Christopher Priest
112	Colette Reap
92	Thomas Recktenwald
41	Roger Robinson
4	Justina Robson
74	Tony Rogers
67	Ian Roll
76	Yvonne Rowse
77	Sally Rowse
94	Geoff Ryman
26	Jamie Scott
51	Alison Scott
107	Ina Shorrock
108	Gavin Shorrock
16	Harpal Singh
55	Adrian Snowdon
101	Kate Solomon
75	Ian Sorensen
110	Douglas Spencer
13	Richard Standage
17	Tim Stannard
80	Chris Stocks
22	Neil Summerfield
83	Calvin Ternent
81	George Ternent
82	Linda Ternent
97	Markus Thierstein
58	David Thomas
90	Neil Tomkinson
91	Alison Tomkinson
66	Dave Tompkins
25	Jim Walker
79	Peter Wareham
61	Gerry Webb
73	Nik Whitehead
24	Anne Wilson
50	Caro Wilson
31	Anne Woodford
32	Alan Woodford

Acknowledgments

Thanks to John Meaney's website for the cover art, and the usual suspects for their written contributions: Dave Lally, Steve Lawson, Richard Standage, Tony Berry and Steve Green. Not forgetting Dave Hicks who reports on the results of last year's survey – Best SF Book since 1971 and heroically provided the cartoon below.

Thanks also to Steve Green and Kevin Clarke for running the Novacon website:

www.novacon.org.uk

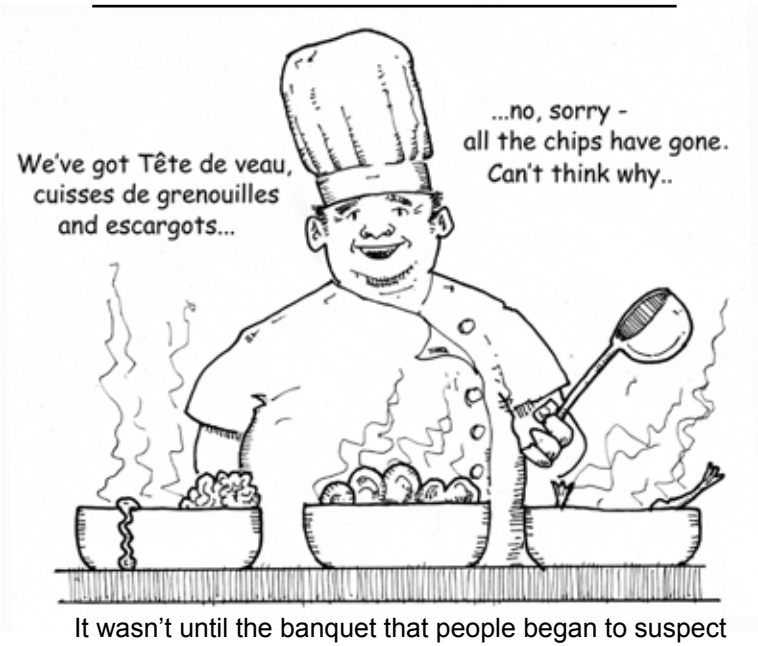
Since 1972, Novacon has been organised by the Birmingham SF Group, which will be celebrating its fortieth birthday in June. Meetings of the BSFG are held on the second Friday of each month at the Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill.

Future guests include John Meaney (May) and Ian Stewart (July). For more information look on their website:

www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk

BSFG Membership costs £16 per year which includes a monthly newsletter. For further information, a copy of their newsletter or a membership application form contact their Membership Secretary Vicky Cook on:

bhamsfgroup@yayoo.co.uk



It wasn't until the banquet that people began to suspect some of the committee had spent too long in France.

ILLUSTRIOUS
EASTERCON 2011

22nd – 25th April 2011

The Hilton Metropole, NEC, Birmingham

With Guests of Honour:

David Weber Author

Peter F. Hamilton Author

David A. Hardy Artist

Roz Kaveney Poet

Vince Docherty Fan

http://illustrious.org.uk/